

**1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement, and how it can be replicated.**

Students definitely need strong oral communication skills to succeed in their future lives and careers. However, few students receive enough training and experience in public speaking. Consequently, many are nervously resistant to any oral assignment. The school's award winning Student Speakers Bureau successfully provides opportunities for building the learner's self esteem, self confidence and speech skills, plus it also gives opportunities for positive peer reinforcement. **The practice is innovative** because the Student Speakers Bureau simultaneously allows students to teach and encourage their peers to communicate orally, and to further develop and refine their own speech skills by serving as guest speakers for a wide variety of classes. It has received two major awards: an A+ for Kids Teacher Network Developer Grant Award in 1989, and a Business Week Award for Instructional Innovation in 1990.

**It simultaneously promotes high achievement** because the student speakers increase their skills and serve their school in any or all of the following ways:

1. They serve as guest lecturers on any reasonable topic requested by the host teacher, and conduct their own research for this speech.
2. They instruct classes on "How to Give a Good Speech". This positive peer encouragement helps reduce the universal reluctance to present all types of oral reports, and fosters better results.
3. They present panel discussions or debates on topics of current interest, such as violence reduction, children with AIDS, students' rights, or preservation of the environment.
4. Directly or indirectly, they inform underclassmen about the merits of taking one of the school's elective speech courses next year.

In addition, the student speakers are willing to lead brief discussions after any of their presentations in the classroom.

Once they have learned and practiced the basics of oral communication, members of any speech elective or English class either volunteer for, or are given a position on the Speakers Bureau. Teachers of any subject can request a student speaker for one of the four services listed above. Periodic, written announcements to the faculty indicate what topics and student speakers are currently available, and when they can be scheduled. Depending on their degree of involvement, student speakers receive credit and/or extra credit for their efforts.

Students most likely to participate are members of one of the speech classes. Since these courses are electives, the students represent a cross section of ages and ability levels. Their many classroom audiences are also diverse in grade level, ability, and size. In the school, the speech teacher coordinates this program. However, any class studying a unit on public speaking could form a speakers bureau, and any interested teacher could develop and implement this program. The Student Speakers Bureau could also be easily carried out on an informal basis among several cooperating teachers.

Since the program is designed to operate within existing schedules and classrooms, no special set up is required. The cost is minimal, because xeroxed instructions, schedules, and announcements are the only essential materials. Videotaping of the students' speeches is sometimes used for self evaluation. Also, occasional guest speakers from business or civic organizations provide the students with standards to emulate. **This program is easily replicated** because all needed materials are printed in a packet which could be mailed or made available on the school's Web site. Participating teachers are also willing to share ideas.

In general, the Student Speakers Bureau develops and utilizes available student speaking talent. By furnishing positive role models, it also encourages other students to successfully express themselves orally.

**2. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the *Core Curriculum Content and/or Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards* that the practice addresses.**

Although effective oral and written communication skills are vitally important contributors to a successful life and career, many students receive little instruction in speech, and they often resist assignments in this area because of their insecurity. This weakness does not automatically improve as they mature; a recent popular survey recently declared that people tend to fear public speaking more than they fear death. Even the school's students enrolled in a speech elective class expressed a weakness in their course of study. Though they eventually became comfortable addressing their classmates, they felt nervous all over again when they had to speak to a new audience. Obviously, the restricted audience in the speech elective was an inherent limitation, so **in response to these educational needs**, the concept of the Student Speakers Bureau was born in the 1984-85 school year. Now, the student speakers have an outlet for practicing their training and gaining much needed experience, and the host classes, homerooms, and school clubs who participate also greatly benefit from these presentations. Subjects have covered a wide range of interests, such as "How to Give a Good Speech", "Why You Should Be Physically Fit", "Is Elvis Alive?", "Dealing with Peer Pressure", and "The Discrimination of Senior Citizens". In addition to polishing their own public speaking and leadership skills, the student speakers also serve as positive role models for their peers.

The Student Speakers Bureau also addresses many of the **Core Curriculum Content Standards** required by the New Jersey Department of Education. In the area of **Cross-Content Workplace Readiness**, Standard #2 states, "All students will use information, technology, and other tools." In order to achieve their goals, the student speakers must be able to develop, locate, summarize, organize, synthesize, and evaluate information. The preparation phase of research and writing always precedes oral presentations. Closely related is Standard #3, which states, "All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills." In addition to using the media center for collection and evaluation of materials, student speakers must analyze the needs of each particular audience and adjust their presentations accordingly. Standard #4 is also applicable: "All students will demonstrate self-management skills." Both the speakers and their audiences need to demonstrate respect for people of different backgrounds and interests. All participants in the Student Speakers Bureau need to be able to work cooperatively and harmoniously with others to accomplish goals.

Furthermore, the **Language Arts Literacy Standards** are well represented in this program. Standard 3.1, "All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences" is obviously an essential component, since the Student Speakers Bureau does provide this experience. Quality in both content and delivery is always stressed. Similarly, Standard #3.2 states "All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources." The classroom audiences demonstrate comprehension of and appropriate listener response to the Speakers Bureau presentations. In addition, the reading, writing, and research described in the paragraph above also apply to the corresponding Language Arts Literacy Standards 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5.

There are many benefits provided by the Student Speakers Bureau, to the audiences as well as to the presenters. This program successfully offers opportunities for building students' self esteem, communication skills, and positive peer reinforcement.

### **3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.**

As described on the preceding pages, both the student speakers and the host classes in our heterogeneous population greatly benefit from these presentations. The speakers must be proficient in all the stages of preparing various types of speeches, from analyzing the audience to writing the outline. The classroom audiences must actively listen to a variety of situations, and they must demonstrate comprehension and appropriate listener response.

**A variety of assessment measures** are available to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. A major incentive for the speakers is the awarding of credit or extra credit for their efforts. The amount of credit awarded by the teacher depends on the degree of the speakers' involvement and the quality of their presentations. The host teacher completes a special "Speakers Bureau Evaluation" rating sheet, which scores elements such as preparation, attitude, eye contact, volume, posture, and gestures. This written reaction enables the student speakers to self evaluate and improve their performances. In addition, the facilitating teacher can use this evaluation to determine the amount of credit received. Furthermore, the organizing teacher keeps track of how many speeches are given by each individual or group, which also helps determine the amount of credit or extra credit received. Classroom audience reactions can be assessed by teacher observation during the presentation, whole class discussions after the speech, and/or separate written evaluations by students in the class. In the school, both written and oral reactions to the Speakers Bureau have been very positive, and this program has also awakened an interest in speaking among some students, motivating them to elect a speech class the following year.

At the end of the school year, all participants in the Speakers Bureau complete a written student evaluation of the program. They respond to questions on what types of speeches were given, how their audiences reacted, how they and their audiences benefited from the presentations, and what changes they would propose to improve the program. Host teachers who participated are polled informally by the Speakers Bureau facilitating teacher. In all cases, the responses have been overwhelmingly favorable. The continuation of this program has been enthusiastically recommended by the school's English Department. The Speakers Bureau not only helps develop a variety of communication skills, but it also will help the school prepare for next year's HSPT due notice testing in the added areas of speaking, listening, and viewing. Participation in this program is a useful component of our ongoing monitoring of student progress in all areas of effective communication.